

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

June 3, 2005

Employee News

The Weekly Wrap Up welcomes submissions regarding employee promotions, professional accomplishments, awards, retirements, regional developments and more. If you are interested in submitting information on such topics, please contact public information officer K. Danielle Edwards at K.Danielle.Edwards@state.tn.us.

Faith-based Recruitment Initiative Gets Positive Press

The department's work with Nashville's Mount Zion Baptist Church in recruiting more resource parents was recognized in a story that appeared in the *Nashville City Paper* on June 2, 2005. DCS began working with the church's New Level CDC in the hopes of attracting – and training – prospective adoptive and foster parents, as well as highlighting the need for more families to serve minority children.

You may view the story at the following link:

http://www.nashvillecitypaper.com/index.cfm?section_id=9&screen=news&news_id=41884

Peabody Residential Treatment Center Receives Re-accreditation

Peabody Residential Treatment Center was recently re-accredited by the American Correctional Association by unanimous vote. The Memphis-based residential treatment center received a 100-percent compliance rating.

The road to accreditation involves completing a comprehensive assessment. The entire program's operations are compared to national standards. Everything is evaluated: Ways to do the job better, methods to keep staff morale high and improvements that the young residents are making in their lives.

Please take a moment to congratulate Terry Markle and his staff at Peabody.

Foster and Adoptive Care Association Sponsors Softball Team

Submitted by Joe Brandon, Foster Parent Support Case Manager

The Foster and Adoptive Care Association of Coffee and Moore counties have sponsored a girls' softball team. We feel we are the first association in the state to undertake this activity.

We have been searching for ways to increase the association's involvement in the recruitment of local foster parents. One of the things we felt that hindered our efforts in recruitment was the image of foster parents being portrayed in the newspaper. The concept that all foster parents being the same had to be changed. We felt that changes had to be made in the local community.

We wished to improve the image of our foster parents and allow them to become more involved in the community. This would provide the opportunity to show that we were more than just foster parents. We decided that becoming involved with a softball team would place us in the position to interact in this activity as members of the community, as well as foster parents.

The initial idea was to sponsor several teams, but we decided to focus on one team this year, so the experience would be a positive one. There was a slot for a new team in the 9- and 10-year-old girls category, and we sponsored it. We went through the draft and selected our players. We have some very nice young ladies on the team. The team was not established for foster children, but for children who wished to play ball. Therefore, the team is comprised of children who simply wish to play ball; there are no labels on the children.

To ensure that everything went well and the children conducted themselves in a manner that would reflect positively on the team, the association members agreed to become coaches and managers. The president of the association, Jean Martinez, is one of the coaches. The associate members Angie Drive and April Stephens also volunteered their services, as a manager and coach, respectively.

We have received some positive comments from those attending the games, including the players' parents. The team plays several times a week, where a crowd of several hundred often watches. We have been very pleased with the reception the team has received and the acceptance the community has extended.

The team has been very successful and positive for everyone involved, and we intend to follow the original plan – next year sponsoring teams in several age groups.

Principles of Professional Behavior Continue to Shape Our Work

Submitted by Commissioner Viola P. Miller

The Basic Principles of Professional Behavior continue to change the way employees interact and relate not only to one another, but with the greater community as well. When I joined the Department of Children's Services, I introduced the Basic Principles of

Professional Behavior as a means to proactively imprint the way our workers at all levels perceive and approach their work within the agency, as well as how our work is perceived and received by the citizenry that we serve.

The Basic Principles of Professional Behavior are:

1. Preserve the integrity of others.
2. Practice active listening.
3. Involve others in problem solving.
4. Take responsibility for your own behavior.

Some regional and county offices, I know, have the Basic Principles posted in their offices. Other times, these principles are reiterated at the beginnings of staff meetings. In our Core Leadership meetings in Central Office, we begin our agenda with the Basic Principles of Professional Behavior. Various members of the Core Leadership Team, who are directors and executive directors in various divisions, say them aloud. And while doing so might seem redundant to some, the fact that staff of all levels across the state can rattle off the principles off the tops of their heads on a whim says something.

It says that the principles resonate with them. It says that the principles have meaning in their daily work. It says that employees are committed to embodying and internalizing these principles, which positively informs the multitude of functions our agency serves with its 4,000 employees.

In preserving the integrity of others, employees remain mindful that when addressing and interacting with others – be it a coworker or client – they are dealing with human beings who are entitled to basic decency and respect. There is a level of morality intrinsic to preserving the integrity of others. This sense of morality is not dogmatic or divisive; it is appealing to many because of the human simplicity associated with it.

When we practice active listening, we become cognizant of not only what we ourselves say, or are waiting to say when someone else finishes speaking. We begin to engage in dialogues and conversations more purposefully, more collectively and more respectfully. Oftentimes, we hear about people who are big talkers and who might be known for their ideas and personalities, but what many fail to acknowledge is that being a skilled communicator involves being a good listener. Talking is only half of an equation that demands reciprocity in the communication and dissemination of ideas.

By involving others in problem solving, we acknowledge that more than one person can contribute to formulating solutions to issues. As individuals with a diverse range of backgrounds and thought processes, it is only prudent to involve others in problem solving when seeking sound solutions and remedies to what in our world can sometimes seem like insurmountable obstacles. Think of how problems might be addressed in your own families. Sure, someone might have more knowledge or authority in an area, but with the brainstorming of all family members, a solution that proves best and most mutually beneficial for all might be reached.

When people take responsibility for their own behavior, people become accountable to themselves, their clients and the agency for the decisions that they make and manner in which they act. When people take responsibility for their own actions, they take ownership of all of their interactions with others – from the slightest word spoken to the simplest physical gesture. The agency raises the bar for expected performance and professionalism when staff assumes responsibility for themselves in this way.

The Basic Principles of Professional Behavior might seem like four simple sentences to some. But they are the guiding light for imparting – and continuing – the new spirit of urgency, accountability and respect within the department. I am hopeful and confident that as we continue to embody the Basic Principles that the changes we see within ourselves and our counterparts will become obvious to all outsiders who see DCS in a new, reshaped light.

CSA Transition Update

Submitted by Tom Riss, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, and Debbie Waddell, Director, Prevention and Preservation

In January of 2005, the Commissioner announced the department's intention to discontinue contracting with the community services agencies (CSAs) – that DCS intended to retain the approximately \$50 million in funding in order to provide those contracted services itself. In addition, the department intended to write legislation that would allow for all of the CSA employees in DCS-funded positions to transition to state employment with DCS in similar positions. The reasoning behind the transition of services to DCS can be summarized in three key points: 1) improved agency and system accountability, 2) the achievement of seamless case management, and 3) more effective provider contract monitoring.

The proposed timeline for starting this transition process was July 1, 2005, with an identified completion date of June 30, 2006. Considering the scope of this transition, it was a very ambitious timeline, but one that the department was committed to meet. This announcement thus sparked a flurry of activity that has not abated since that time. The department's plan was to transition the first three regions (Davidson, Hamilton and Knox) on July 1, 2005, the next three (South Central, Upper Cumberland and Northwest) in August, the following three (Southeast, Southwest and Shelby) in October, and finally to complete the transition of the last three regions (Mid-Cumberland, Northeast and East) by December 31, 2005. We now find ourselves within 30 days of the first group's transition deadline, which is a good time to assess our progress.

The first and most important point to make is that we are indeed on schedule to meet our July 1 deadline. Two important pieces of legislation were written and passed through the legislature and are ready for the Governor's signature. The first bill arranged for the CSAs to be severed from DCS and attached to the Department of Finance and Administration. This was important because it allowed for the CSAs to continue to exist

and to provide services to their communities independent of DCS. For many of the CSAs, this was a significant step, because they had developed other contracts outside of their obligations to DCS. The second bill allowed for the orderly transition of (713) CSA employees to state service with DCS without the need to work civil service registers. The bill further stipulates that this transfer “shall not result in any diminution, impairment, or interruption of current salary, accrued sick and annual leave, seniority, retirement plans, or amounts already accrued under a deferred compensation plan.” The bill also carried a proviso to address the unique situation with Davidson County’s Caring for Children agency, which was under Metro authority. These bills could not have been passed without the hard work of many people both inside and outside of DCS.

In fact, when you think about it, this transition is really quite like a corporate merger. It is a huge undertaking with many facets of organizational challenges that involves people from many different divisions within our department. For example, people from legal, fiscal, facilities and support, personnel, information systems, training and contracting, just to name a few. We’ve also worked closely with other agencies such as the state Department of Personnel and the Department of Finance and Administration, juvenile court, and Metro Nashville human resources. Then there are also the many DCS/CSA transition teams meeting out in the regions on a regular basis, coordinated by a joint effort between the two agencies. This monumental task could not be accomplished without the teamwork of all these entities. Finally, in order to help facilitate the transition of the CSAs, as each new group of regions prepares to make the transition we are providing them with a 1.5-day training consisting of a one-day overview of the new DCS practice model, and a half-day devoted to organizational culture change. Both CSA and regional DCS staff will be involved in this training. Additional training is being planned for the post-transfer time period.

In conclusion, we are truly excited as we approach the July 1 deadline for transitioning the first three regions. Davidson, Hamilton and Knox are eager and ready to roll! And there are some exciting new management strategies emerging from this transition, such as the concept of a regional fiscal director, the idea of establishing human resources directors in the field, as well as field-located contract monitors. These ideas and more will be explored as we complete the transition journey, initially with the first three regions to transition and then with the other regions as each of them transitions over to DCS. But there is still a lot of work ahead for us, as the transition of the CSAs to DCS is but the first step in our strategy to achieve accountability, seamless case management, and effective contract monitoring. We want to thank all of you for your patience and cooperation during this very challenging transition, but one thing about social workers – They are resilient!

Godspeed and be careful out there.



***A child can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer. – Author
unknown***

Children make you want to start life over. – Muhammad Ali